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Cuckolds, cucks, and their transgressions

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ABSTRACT

Cuckold porn, which typically depicts a white man ‘forced’ to watch his white wife have sex with a black man, has become a popular subgenre over the past decade. In 2014, masculinist and racist ‘cuck’ memes began to appear in online forums and soon entered mainstream political discourse. This article considers cuckold porn and cuck memes alongside historical cuckoldry performances, like the contented ‘wittol’, an Elizabethan antecedent of the ‘fuck my wife’ desires of the modern fetish. Cuckold porn is marked by a number of queer and formal transgressions, namely in its unique ability to transcend norms of identification and spectator theory while exaggerating sexual and racial difference. The capacity to subvert yet reinforce white masculinity was maintained in the transmission of the fetish through porn and is reflected in the memes it inspired. The article ends with a discussion of cuckold porn’s role as a transceiver of specific and higher-order behavioural scripts.

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Introduction

Cuckoldry has inspired performative acts for centuries, including plays, forms of public shaming, and even sacred art. More recently, cuckolding developed into a fetish and porn subgenre, wherein a tormented white cuckold is ‘forced’ to watch his white wife have sex with a black man (but he often joins in). In 2015, ‘cuck’ and ‘cuckservative’ emerged as conservative epithets and memes, both marked by their masculinist and racist overtones. These first appeared during the 2014 Gamergate controversy and spread to mainstream discourse in the months leading up to the 2016 presidential election. This article theorizes a relationship between cuckold porn and cuck memes’ depictions of white masculinist anxieties. These are considered alongside the long tradition of cuckoldry texts, including the gender-bending skimmingtons and the ‘wittol’, a construct which reinforced normativity through its feigned abdications of patriarchy. A discussion of the intersection of interracial and queer lust within cuckold porn reveals its formal transgressions, particularly its contraventions of identification and spectator theory through an amplification of racial and sexual difference. Despite the subtleties of these pleasures, cuckold porn, like a modern wittol, acts to confirm heterosexist, white masculinity. I contend that this capacity to subvert yet reinforce normativity was maintained in the transmission of the fetish through porn and is reflected in the memes it inspired. Groups

within the so-called manosphere co-opted this racialized revision of cuckoldry to express masculinist and racist ideologies, and cuckold pornography provided the framing narrative. Given the dearth of literature or reporting on the racial aspects of the cuckold fetish before the development of the memes, porn seems the most obvious, popular, and ubiquitous means of diffusion. The potential relationship between cuckold porn and cuck memes demonstrates the kinds of specific and higher-order behavioural scripts that may be transmitted in and out of porn, as well as the continued reach of damaging sexual-racial myths in America.

Poynted hornes and wittols

Alison Sinclair calls the cuckold, as a literary and performative phenomenon, ‘the counter-exemplum of patriarchal culture – the man deemed to have failed in relation to a woman, and hence a failure in the eyes of other men’ (1993, 27). At its most basic, the cuckold is used to explore the anxieties of a wounded patriarchy, whose fears of sexual failure are made benign through mockery. As early modern Europe became obsessed with the trope and its symbols, cuckold became a common epithet for shaming and abuse. In seventeenth-century England, for instance, most defamation cases hinged on whether or not individuals were in fact cuckolds or whores (Vaisey 1976). Cuckolds were often drawn as having horns sprouting from their heads, inspiring real-life accusers to act this out ‘by poynting or boring with his fingers forked in a manner of hornes’ (Vaisey 1976, 187–188). A practice called house-scorning developed around this time, wherein horns, graffiti, faeces, and animal parts were splayed across house facades, making the disgrace of cuckoldry impossible to hide from the neighbourhood. House-scorning would sometimes accompany an act called the skimmington, a local parade where the putative cuckold was captured, placed backwards on a horse, and beaten by women holding a giant, novelty ladle. Male neighbours of the cuckold would sometimes perform as a proxy couple during the skimmington, playing out the lovers’ purported transgressions while cross-dressing and brandishing other gendered household items (Katritzky 2014; Musacchio 2014).

Early modern literature is laden with cuckoldry, take its role in Shakespeare, Boccaccio, and Chaucer (Finlayson 2002; Alfar 2017). The obsession extended to visual art, including Joseph’s many turns as God’s divine cuckold, the political engravings of Bernard Picart, or drawings by Baccio del Bianco with their survey of the gamut of literary and visual gags associated with the trope (Alberti 2014; Matthews-Grieco 2014; Rice 2014). At the height of its popularity, there developed a variant considered a contented or willing cuckold, also known as the wittol. Like ‘cuckold’, it appeared as both a literary construct and a real-world epithet (Vaisey 1976; Panek 2001). The wittol, who acquiesces to his wife’s infidelity, is a clear antecedent to the ‘fuck my wife’ desires of the modern fetish. On the surface, the wittol is a satire of masculinist anxieties. Yet in his wilful abdication of patriarchal authority, the wittol manages to escape the stigmas of cuckoldry. He repurposes female infidelity in reducing his wife to chattel, thereby, if only in his mind, retaining a modicum of control. This reversal – appropriated, eroticized fears of impotence – is key to understanding the modern fetish and cuckold porn. Cuckoldry texts may toy with patriarchal anxieties, but they do not transcend the power structures they rely on. Rather, they simply render masculinist fears safe. Even at their most transgressive – the cross-dressing

of the skimmington, a wittol's hospitality, or the conflagration of desires informing cuckold porn – these texts exist to assuage hegemonic masculinity through self-deprecation.

Reparations play: racial and queer disidentification

Cuckold porn, where a man (the cuckold) watches his wife have sex with another man (the cuckolder), has been an increasingly popular subgenre over the past decade, both in the United States and the United Kingdom (Hosie 2017; The Cut 2017). According to statistics released by Pornhub, searches in the United States for cuckold videos in 2016 were up 495% from 2009 (The Cut 2017). In the same period, searches for 'wife' were 418% more popular, with the most popular search with 'husband' being 'watches wife fuck'. Men were 58% more likely than women to search for cuckold porn. While the subgenre is less popular for men aged 18–24, it grew for every group up to age 64. Related searches reveal the queer, interracial, and humiliation aspects of the genre: 'cleanup' and 'interracial' were the third and sixth most common terms to be searched with 'cuckold', with 'femdom humiliation' and 'bisexual husband' being the most popular searches before a viewer searches 'cuckold'. Further, cuckold porn seems to generate particularly strong responses from viewers – one study of streaming sites listed 'cuckold' as the top tag on XHamster in user reaction, based on the average number of comments per video in a given category (Mazières et al. 2014, 86–87).

What sets apart cuckold porn and role play (in polyamory contexts) from earlier cuckoldry texts are their inescapable interracial and queer elements. The cuckold is often 'forced' to engage in homoerotic acts, like fellating her lover or eating his semen from out of her (the aforementioned 'cleanup'). Despite its popularity, reporting on the fetish usually expresses jaw-dropped disbelief at its existence (Girl on the Net 2016; Seltzer 2016; Weiss 2017). In 2012, a woman told *The New York Times* she was amazed at seeing men 'eroticizing as a defense mechanism': 'It surprises me to no end that the sexual fetish of cuckoldry, once thought of as a disability, could be shared by so many people' (Calhoun 2012, 6). The cuckold fetish combines an often queer eroticization of male inadequacy with the pervading fears and stereotypes associated with black/white interracial sexuality. Ariane Cruz's description of cuckold porn captures how these qualities coalesce into:

a host of queer pleasures and anxieties: black/white homoerotic desire, white female desire for the black male body, and our collective anxieties regarding monogamy and the institution of marriage as well as the ambivalent and precarious social positionality of blackness (here specifically black manhood). (As quoted in Chude-Sokei et al. 2016, 57–58)

In this section I consider these queer and interracial aspects of cuckold porn, which in turn reveal its formal subversions, particularly as they pertain to identification and spectator theory. Also, I contextualize cuckold porn within the history of interracial pornography and plantation stereotypes. Despite the subtleties of these transgressive pleasures, cuckold porn ultimately acts to reaffirm heterosexist, white masculinity. This performance of queer and interracial lust, often using a white female as proxy for sexual contact, operates much like the contented cuckoldry of the wittol, providing a safe space for men to explore masculinist anxieties. But unlike previous constructs, the modern fetish is designed

to perform racial difference and associated fears. In this way, cuckold porn racializes the subversions of its antecedents.

In order to offer contemporary porn references and some idea of the breadth of videos that are being tagged as cuckold, I have put together a brief empirical section. Obviously, this is by no means an exhaustive analysis of videos considered cuckold porn. But it does capture the first pages of results on one of the most popular streaming sites, and hopefully gives some credence to the textual analysis that follows. I went through the first 100 hits on XVideos that appear with the search 'cuckold' (XVideos 2018). As per the heteronormative search function, these only bring up videos tagged straight (gay and trans videos are excluded unless the search is coupled with a gay or trans term). Of all the videos, only 67 were 'traditional' cuckold videos depicting an on-screen cuckold, his partner, and a cuckolder. Within these, a white cuckold was depicted 66 times (the only non-white cuckold being Indian). The cuckold performed unequivocally queer acts in 19 of them – usually a clean-up of his partner's vagina or mouth-to-mouth cum-swapping, but also a few blow-jobs, rim-jobs, and a facial. One-third of the videos did not depict a cuckold. The implication might be that cuckold is the camera person, or perhaps the viewer, or maybe some of the videos appeared due to lazy or clickbait tagging. A small number (three videos) depicted interactions between a putative cuckold and a dominatrix.

In terms of the cuckolder's race, the ratio was 67:25 black to white (46:17 in the 'traditional' videos), excluding the compilation videos which depicted both black and white cuckolders. In the 30 videos without an on-screen cuckold, the putative cuckolder was usually black (21 videos), and in eight of them he was white. The female partner was white 96 times (65 of the 67 'traditional' videos). In the other four, three were East Asian and one was Indian. Tellingly, black women were never depicted as partners of the cuckold; the only black woman appearing in the surveyed videos joins in with the black man (her partner) and the cuckold's white wife. Some of the 'non-traditional' videos included one tagged 'reverse cuckold', featuring a man and two women, one gagged and bound – all of whom were white. Others were simple male-male-female bisexual videos with no humiliation element. Four were labelled 'mom cuckold', where a young white woman watches her 'mother' have sex with a black man. These seemed to have no humiliation element, either.

Twenty-one of the videos featured white-on-white cuckoldry. With race not directly at issue, these videos make up the 'difference' between cuckold and cuckolder in their physical attributes (the cuckolder is a stud, the cuckold is not). In five of these videos, there was reciprocity in the appearance of the white men, and these might be better classified as the typical male-male-female bisexual porn mentioned earlier, with no performance of humiliation. Or, perhaps, they truly were considered cuckold videos by the creator/uploader, wherein the white cuckold has little inspiration to perform the kind of anxiety reserved for white cuckolds encountering black men. Yet there were still examples of white-on-white, 'traditional' cuckold porn which showcase, among other elements, the cuckold's psychological torment at the sight of his wife's infidelity, his submission to the cuckolder, and the 'forced' performance of queer acts. So, on one level, race clearly is not a necessary condition for a video to be a cuckold porn text. The subgenre as a whole, however, is undeniably obsessed with, if not predicated on, interracial sex. The cuckold and his wife/girlfriend are almost always white, and the cuckolder is black two-thirds of the time. The near irrelevance of black women (and women of colour, generally) to the fantasy is

made well apparent. Given this disparity, and to contextualize cuckold porn's place within the sexual-racial myths of America, I turn to the history and controversies surrounding interracial porn.

Interracial sex was popular in early stags, the silent, anonymous porn films distributed in the first half of the twentieth century. In fact, the constituent elements of cuckold porn – adultery, interracial, group, and homoeroticism – were the illicit ‘specialty acts’ of stags (Waugh 2004, 138). Following the feature-length *Behind the Green Door* (Mitchell and Mitchell 1972), which ushered in the first black porn stars, black and interracial porn soon became ‘specialized economies within hard-core’ (Miller-Young 2007, 268). According to Linda Williams, as interracial lust was commodified by the industry, these films ‘explicitly foregrounded the context of the master/slave dynamic of power as an erotic pleasure grounded in the taboos it transgresses’ (2004, 299). While much has been written about white objectification of the black body, the following are the most relevant in discussing racial tropes within cuckold porn. First, interracial cuckoldry is an eligibility fetish, as the white cuckold has desires for a group (black males) ‘who would not normally be “eligible” as socially acceptable sexual partners’ for either him or his wife (Ley 2009, 171). In the polyamory/sharing community, a white cuckold sees a black man’s rivalry as low risk, as he does not believe his white wife could ever introduce a black lover to her friends or family. Second, interracial porn often relies on stereotypes that have their basis in the plantation South, many of which concern white women. Black men were considered to have a savage desire for white women, and miscegenation laws were particularly obsessed with preventing their interaction. Driven into the psyche of young black men, the taboo forbade a black man to even gaze at a white woman, evinced in the history of lynchings from slavery to the killing of Emmett Till in 1955 (Klotman 1971; Davis 1983). Third is the reduction of the black penis ‘as the ontological synecdoche for the black male body’ (Cruz 2011, 69). Anti-porn activist Gail Dines (2006, 292), surveying comments left under an interracial porn video, notes how a putatively straight white male viewer often ‘seems more entranced by the black penis than by the white woman’s body’, and appears betrayed at the possibility that the penis might be fake. While her observation reflects the queer pleasures and anxieties Cruz reads into the fetish, there are other less transgressive pleasures connected to white viewers’ obsession with black masculinity. In writing about the stags, Williams finds that the filmmakers had seemingly no interest in showing attractive men: ‘part of the pleasure proffered by the film is the spectacle of women having sex with such frankly unlovely men [...] represent[ing] a kind of punishment on the women’ (2005, 113–114). While undoubtedly much has changed in pornography since the stags, this spectacle of unloveliness permeates porn to this day – take the popularity of ‘young/old’ videos (‘teens’ with geriatric men). I find this is often manifested in fetishized interracial and particularly cuckoldry contexts, both in porn and the poly/sharing communities. The white male pleasure in seeing a white woman penetrated by a black penis is not always some transgressive or queer act, but can simply be a desire to see her penetrated by something coded abnormal or animal. If the cuckold fetish is the eroticization of fears of female infidelity or disinterest, the punishing blackness of the cuckold provides some solace for the white male.

Despite its reliance on racist stereotypes, some scholars recognize a transgressive critique of normative prejudices in interracial porn. Williams contends that the stigmas embedded in the genre haunt all interracial sexuality, porn or otherwise, and that the

depiction of these bodies does not have a fixed meaning, as the stereotypes once imposed by racist white men now inform a domain of pleasure 'that is no longer his sole province' (2004, 281). For instance, one self-identifying cuckold told *Vice* that the fetish was 'kind of like reparations play [...] an "I'm sorry" thing' (Pearl 2016). Fixed meanings would prevent society from ever transcending plantation stereotypes and sexual logic. Williams also draws a distinction between knowing racist stereotypes (which she contends all interracial lust relies upon) and believing them. Jennifer Nash (2014) frames it as a desire to not pathologize interracial porn and its viewers as inherently racist, something she detects in most anti-pornography and black feminist readings. She argues that such (purportedly) reductive interpretations prevent one from appreciating how interracial sexuality can abandon a fetishistic logic, rendering the marked other purely as an object. While recognizing these battle lines, I am more concerned with the interaction and transmission of the conflicting pleasures coded within cuckold porn. Although this recent subgenre never transcends the masculinist faux-transgression that cuckoldry texts have long played out in our culture, it provides for a strange repository of formal and identitarian contradictions.

Depictions of interracial sex (both porn and feature film) have 'a nonpresent third term that haunts the scene', namely the betrayed same-race partners (Williams 2004, 297). Cuckold porn appears to reify this ghost, bringing the betrayed white male into the room. As already noted, any same-race partner of the black male appears to be irrelevant to the fetish – she is never depicted nor mentioned. Interracial cuckold porn is exclusively concerned with the anxieties of white men vis-à-vis their possession of white women. The cuckold's presence inflects a conventional depiction of interracial lust with elements that subvert norms of identification in most pornography. Scholars of gay and lesbian porn have noted how 'their' films frustrate spectator theory, which is predicated on gendered difference between performers. Critiques of straight porn's male gaze often focus on how videos are made for and by men, evinced by the ubiquity of point-of-view shots of penetrating the female. In lesbian porn, this displacement of difference liberates women from their 'objectification as spectacle' (Conway 1997, 99). Along the same lines, David Pendleton asks, given gay porn's lack of point-of-view shots, 'What's to prevent me from identifying with the bottom [...] even if there is no reciprocity between the top and the bottom?' (1992, 164). Like lesbian and gay porn, cuckold porn is marked by a noticeable lack of point-of-view shots – everyone is kept in the frame, likely so we can appreciate the cuckold's humiliation/acquiescence. That is to say, cuckold porn is ostensibly 'straight' porn shot like gay/lesbian porn. But where lesbian and gay porn displace spectatorship in sidestepping gendered difference, cuckold porn manages to displace identification and spectatorship norms via an exaggeration of difference, both gendered and racial. This might be unique to cuckold porn.

The intended identification in cuckold porn, one would assume, is between a white male viewer and the white male cuckold. Yet this is complicated by the vagaries of desire present in both (real-life) white male cuckolds and white male consumers of cuckold porn. Real-life cuckolds may not be simply relishing in their own humiliation, as pleasure may also come from the possibilities of identifying alternatively with his wife, 'vicariously experiencing his homosexual desire for sex with black men, by watching his wife enjoy sex with black men', or with the black male, 'whom the husband identifies as virile, powerful, and dominant' (Ley 2009, 171). It seems to me that the intended white male viewer of cuckold porn can identify with the cuckold, or, like a 'real' cuckold, with

one of the others; or all three. Jane Ward mentions cuckold porn in her study of the many ways straight-identifying white males engage in homosexual sex to bolster their own straightness, whiteness, and masculinity.¹ The female is ultimately a proxy or catalyst for this contact, desire, and fluidity of identification. By repurposing her body and co-opting her point of view, cuckolds are capable of remaining ‘*not gay* in their identitarian consequences’, engaging in homosexual sex through ‘disidentification’ (Ward 2015, 5–6; original emphasis). Thus, the fetish and porn cuckold is not simply a contented cuckold (wittol), simultaneously transgressing and reinforcing patriarchal norms, but one which transgresses yet reinforces his own whiteness and straightness. Cuckold porn, which allows for a kind of promiscuity in identification, is conducive to containing a white male’s conflicting, queer eroticization of masculinist and racial fears of abdicating social privilege.

Not every real-life cuckold or cuckold porn viewer is going to be titillated or motivated by all the aspects of the fetish/subgenre mentioned earlier. But I find these anxieties and prejudices are foundational to the construct, and embedded in most instances of cuckold porn. In some ways, the subgenre is a fitting pornographic expression for its time, as it captures the push-and-pull of progress and white America’s deep-seated ambivalence towards black men and white women. Cuckold porn gained popularity in the years following Obama’s election, and in between two failed Clinton campaigns. Also, quite suddenly, its themes and convolutions broke into the political mainstream during the Trump campaign. White America flits between idolizing and despising both women and blackness; eroticizing as it fears what it codes other. This not only happens in comparing different texts, but occurs within a single image. Cuckold porn reveals the aesthetics of this ambivalence. When it comes to sexual–racial fantasies in America, viewers slip between belief and non-belief, fantasy and reification.

Uncuck yourself: metastasis, memes, and the manosphere

In July 2015, conservative pundit Rush Limbaugh differentiated then-candidate Donald Trump from your common ‘cuckolded Republican’ within the Washington establishment (Frost 2015, 107). A flurry of articles on the pejoratives ‘cuck’, ‘cuckservative’, and the online rhetoric of various right-wing groups followed. Noting their commonalities and the timeline of their development, I believe these memes were largely inspired by cuckold fetish as expressed in cuckold pornography. The relationship between the alt-right/men’s rights activist use of cuck memes are a case study for porn as a transceiver for behavioural scripts. The movement appears to be from the fetish community, porn, online forums like 4chan (where the memes emerged), and eventually mainstream discourse. Despite the critiques of normativity outlined by Williams and others, some viewers appear to believe and transmute these racial stereotypes and masculinist narratives. While white supremacists find in cuckoldry an allegory for white genocide, for other groups, including men’s rights activists, cuck is a byword for ‘incel’ (involuntary celibates) or ‘beta’ masculinity. Both use cuck memes to express their ideology. The following section is concerned with the thematic overlap between cuckold porn and cuck memes.

Cuckoldry texts, before the appearance of the modern fetish, were not concerned with the fear of a cuckold as racial other. That cuck memes are racialized reflects the transmission of the racialized fetish, and pornography seems the most obvious medium for it.

Admittedly, there are a few historical cuckoldry texts that were associated with race. Black-face often went hand-in-hand with cuckoldry in Renaissance and Elizabethan drama – take the titular cuckold in John Heywood’s *Johan Johan, The Husband* (1533) whose face gets covered in soot, likening blackness with folly (Hornback 2007).² Others have discussed Shakespeare’s entwinement of race and cuckoldry – Othello is made to think himself a cuckold before he kills his wife, while Elizabeth Spiller (1998) contends that *The Merchant of Venice* recontextualizes a number of cuckoldry jokes through a growing understanding of racial difference in European culture. Yet in these plays there is no depicted cuckold as racial other, nor do they appear to have affected the wider understanding of the cuckoldry trope. Most surveys of historical cuckoldry texts do not mention race, let alone consider it a constituent element (Sinclair 1993; Amussen 2016; Alfar 2017). While taboos around miscegenation have existed for centuries, race became affixed to cuckoldry only in the last few years. Mainstream reporting of the fetish, before the wave of coverage coinciding with the rise of cuck memes and the Trump campaign, were rare and did not discuss race (Ogas and Gaddam 2011; Calhoun 2012). Savage (2007) and Ley (2009) were alone in discussing racial aspects of cuckolding before 2015, while articles on the fetish almost always now do (Snow 2015; Clair 2016; Girl on the Net 2016).

It is widely held that cuck memes are racist. Writing in the *New Statesman*, Tim Squirrelrell (2017) calls cuckservative ‘all things to all bigots: a racially-tinged term of abuse, a slur against men who trust women, a label for conservatives who aren’t conservative in the right ways, and an Islamophobic dog-whistle’. Commentary on the memes, from across the political spectrum, stress these connotations (Frost 2015; Yuhas 2015; Beck 2016; McDermott 2016; Coates 2017). The white nationalist Richard Spencer (who coined the ‘alt-right’ label) says cuck memes ‘call for a racially conscious politics [...] [and do not] make any sense without race’ (as quoted in DeVega 2015). One user of an alt-right forum calls for every white male to ‘[u]ncuck yourself by realizing that race is a vital part (though not the whole) of our ideology, and that “racism” is the last snare of political correctness. Until you do that, you remain a cuck’ (Kelly 2017, 74–75). Ta-Nehisi Coates, a black liberal, also believes the memes have everything to do with race:

Trump’s rise was shepherded by Steve Bannon, a man who mocks his white male critics as ‘cucks.’³ The word, derived from cuckold, is specifically meant to debase by fear and fantasy – the target is so weak that he would submit to the humiliation of having his white wife lie with black men. (Coates 2017)

How and when the cuck memes first developed is a matter of speculation. Milo Yiannopolous (2015), who worked for Bannon at *Breitbart*, believes the meme came out of image boards like 4chan, and ‘didn’t metastasise’ out of porn or white power forums like Stormfront. He claims cuck memes first became popular during the Gamergate controversy in 2014, which is corroborated elsewhere (lefunnyjewmeme 2015; Purdom 2016; Squirrelrell 2017).⁴ Yiannopolous (2015) also contends that cuck memes are not racist, in that ‘[a] conflation is going on here: because the word “cuckold” has racial connotations, and because those who use the word “cuckservative” are angry about immigration and the bizarre contortions and excesses of liberal race agitators’. That the cuckold fetish could be racialized, and cuck memes be deployed racially, while having nothing to do with race seems far-fetched. While the first uses of cuck during Gamergate may not have been racial, by the end of 2014 distinctly racist uses of cuck were appearing

on both 4chan and Stormfront (AlanalsIrish 2014; Don 2015). Unless the alt-right is acutely aware of Renaissance depictions of blackface, it is likely that the forum users who promptly racialized cuck memes got the racialized, fetish definition of cuckolding from porn. Notably, Yiannopolous (2010) is also vehemently anti-pornography, having penned an article about how porn is 'about to spill over into real life', tempting young men with 'borderline-illegal' acts and a gateway to paedophilia.⁵ Yet he fails to appreciate the potential spill-over where he and his alt-right fellow travellers are implicated.

Commonly, cuck memes are explicitly racist and masculinist. The racial memes usually depict the porn scenario of a white male acquiescing to his white wife having sex with a black male. One has the cuckold watching on the same couch with the caption 'I don't hate minorities and neither does my wife's son' (oreopoptartman 2016). Others depict an oblivious white male holding a mixed-race child (discord666 2016; JC 2016). But there are uses of 'cuck' that are not overtly racist. These tend to be (just) anti-feminist (Chuck Norris's Son 2018; Fully Semi-Automatic Assault Lizard 2018; Life in the Onion 2018) or broadly anti-liberal (America 1st 2018; Brooks 2018; Mr. AB Mike 2018). It is also commonly used to ridicule 'beta' masculinity (The Alt Kek 2017; CatherinNicholsArt 2018) and men with small penises, as in 'My friend and I see a pathetic #pindick #cuck slave. OMG it was tiny LMAO!' (Queen Cuckoldress 2015; Venus 2018). More recently, the word has evolved into an all-purpose epithet, as in 'If you spoil movies for other people you're a fucking cuck', or 'Just because I couldn't tell you what Peyton Manning's second cousins mothers [sic] maiden name is doesn't mean I don't know anything about sports you cuck', or '[You] can't cuck the Zuck', offering support to Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg after his testimony before Congress (Dijon Musk 2018; Jcampz 2018; Nelson 2018). Following the logic of 'cuckservative', where the word is used to signify a corruption of values, the leftist hosts of the Chapo Trap House podcast use cuck as a pejorative towards traditional conservatives blindly uncritical of Donald Trump, those with harsh words for Trump who ultimately vote for his policies, and conservative Jews who tolerate the alt-right despite its virulent anti-Semitism (Chapo Trap House 2016). But there does not appear to be much adoption of the memes on the left.

These subsequent, shifting definitions of cuck are all reactions to the development and popularization of cuck memes within the manosphere. Cuck memes are used as part of a lexicon of entitlement and perceived victimhood – with intentions more or less racist or masculinist, depending on the user. White supremacist groups use cuck and cuckservative to discuss white genocide, the purportedly deliberate, clandestine social engineering that seeks to disempower whiteness in western culture and society (Kelly 2017). Depictions of interracial relationships in the media are supposed examples – one article on *Infowars* claims that advertisements and programmes on Nickelodeon are attempting to get children into the fetish (Watson 2015). Cuckold porn, then, would be one of the more brazen means by which the shadow forces of miscegenation 'cuck' white minds and desires.

But the manosphere is not wholly populated by white supremacists, self-identifying or otherwise. Debbie Ging (2017) divides it into a number of distinct groups, including men's rights activists, pick-up artists, Christian conservatives, and gamer/geek culture. For these individuals, labelling one a cuck has little to do with miscegenation fears and is more concerned with the supposed pathologizing of male sexuality by feminism (once again, in a deliberate, clandestine social engineering). A cuck is termed 'beta', as in '[t]hat Beta guy is a

thirsty simping cuck who needs to pick up his nut sack out of her purse and walk away' (George Liquor American 2017). Men who are not 'alpha' or 'red-pilled', who remain beta, often identify as 'incels' (involuntary celibates) or 'betafags'. These are predominately young, sexually frustrated white men. Ging finds that many of those she classifies as part of the gamer/geek strain of the manosphere tend to support sexual fluidity, watch gender-bending pornography, and adopt inclusive rhetoric, all the while maintaining many masculinist attitudes. For her, these 'hybrid masculinities symbolically distance men from hegemonic masculinity, while simultaneously compounding existing social and symbolic boundaries' (Ging 2017, 4–5).

Cuckold porn, with its simultaneous subversions and reversions around race and gender, caters for a multitude of hybrid masculinities through disidentification. It may also have provided for the cacophony of racist and masculinist memes that have swept the manosphere since 2014. The men who use cuck memes for predominately anti-feminist, masculinist purposes are expressing the fears of abdicating, or a belief in having had stolen, their 'rightful' patriarchal role. This is a foundational anxiety of all cuckoldry texts, and one reintroduced, eroticized, racialized, and popularized by cuckold porn. The influence is most apparent in those who use racist cuck memes, as they often rely on the specific imagery of interracial cuckold porn, and more generally its previously uncommon, racialized conception of cuckoldry. Further, in both cuckold porn and the manosphere, where 'cuck' is used as a synonym for victims of feminist conspiracies, there have developed variants of equivocating masculinities which, on the surface, subvert heteronormative aspects of hegemonic masculinity, yet ultimately reaffirm poisonous, masculinist attitudes. It seems plausible that cuckold porn may have shaped the rhetoric of the manosphere and perhaps played some role in transmitting the ideology and attitudes prevalent within these groups.

Studies, potentially anti-porn in nature, have investigated whether sexual and non-sexual behaviours are socialized through porn consumption.⁶ These include general sexual-risk behaviours and non-sexual crime (Hussen et al. 2012), non-sexual attitudes towards women (Jansma et al. 1997), and the endorsement of violence and sexist attitudes (Malamuth, Hald, and Koss 2012; Hald et al. 2013). Wright and Bae (2015, 446) separate learned behaviour into specific scripts ('specific behaviors in specific contexts') and abstracted, higher-order scripts ('general rules and principles for behavior'). Replicating a depicted action observed in porn would be a specific script, while developing general attitudes would be higher order. In discerning porn's role in informing these scripts, one would have to determine directional causation. Pornography use might cause or influence behaviour, or perhaps individuals with certain traits are more likely to use and accept pornography and/or prefer certain kinds of porn over others (Willoughby et al. 2014). Wright and Bae (2015, 456) assert that their study, concerning gendered attitudes socialized through porn consumption, controls for confounds like selective exposure (content-congruent attitudes due to intentional viewing, not socialization) and other third variables which reflect preformed gendered attitudes. They conclude that porn appears to direct behaviours and guides attitudes, in that viewers internalize information and attitudes embedded in porn, lending support to the idea that gendered 'sexual socialization' was more likely than 'a selective exposure perspective on pornography'. They also claim that the results support the theoretical premise that porn consumption may lead to both specific and higher-order scripting effects.

It then seems plausible that cuckold pornography could direct behaviours of viewers, and the recent development of the cuck memes, performative acts, and associated attitudes within the manosphere and beyond may be examples of both specific and higher-order scripting. The development and use of the cuck epithet seems a potential specific script, as all cuckold pornography explicitly brands the white male a cuckold. Men and women who learn about cuckolding through porn, and subsequently take steps to act out the fantasy, would also qualify as specific scripting. Higher-order scripts transmitted from cuckold pornography may include developing more general racial/racist and gendered/sexist attitudes, such as the objectification of black masculinity, or resentment towards women, particularly in terms of impotence anxieties. Viewing cuckold porn may also engender interest in some of Ward's (2015) 'not gay' acts; given the genre's unique form of fetishizing male impotence and embedding it in putatively forced, homoerotic scenarios. Further, the hybrid masculinities of some within the manosphere may well have been influenced by cuckold or other gender-bending pornography. Wright and Bae (2015, 455–4556) also note that viewing porn does not 'prospectively predict' the gender-role attitudes of younger adults, but does predict gendered attitudes towards women among men aged 45 and older, across education level, minority status, gender, politics, and religion. Taken alongside the statistics released by Pornhub – noting that while cuckold porn is less popular for men aged 18–24, it grows for every group up to age 64 – it is possible that cuckold porn could be then having a greater effect, directing both specific and higher-order scripts in older males. Wright and Bae suggest stronger associations would be found in gender role-reversed content. Thus, studying more closely the relation between cuckold porn consumption and behavioural scripting could be fruitful for understanding precisely how behaviours and attitudes are transmitted out of porn, particularly the queer disidentifications of the subgenre. Directed studies could ascertain what, if any, socialization may occur as a result of consuming cuckold porn.

Cuckold porn made its mark on political discourse leading up to the 2016 election. But it may prove to demonstrate how wider belief systems, including both ideology and specific acts (speech, sexual behaviours) are diffused online. Understanding the popularity and transmutations of racialized cuckold texts could deepen our understanding of the continued reach of gendered and racial myths in America. Appreciating the embedded, conflicting desires of cuckold porn, in particular its eroticization as self-defence, may allow us to understand the vacillations within the behaviours we code as hate, with the potential for those who feel these anxieties/desires to deconstruct them as well. Both misogyny and racial hatred are entwinements of politics, aesthetics, and sexuality. Perhaps in the recent metastasis of cuckold texts is a chance of decoding a few of the pervading fantasies of white America.

Notes

1. See Ward's (2015)[AQ2] analysis of the (often penetrative) hazing rituals these men perform on other straight white males in college fraternities, the US military, and other contexts.
2. Other plays with blackface cuckolds include Richard Edward's *Damon and Pythias* (1571), George Chapman's *May Day* (1601), and the fourteenth-century Dutch farce *De Buskenblaser* [*The Box Blower*] (Hornback 2007, 2008).

3. Before Bannon's dismissal, acrimony between him and his fellow Senior Advisor Jared Kushner was widely rumoured. These include reports that he would openly refer to Kushner as a cuck (Times of Israel 2017).
4. In August 2014, what started as the online harassment of female video game industry professionals fanned into an internet culture war starring a cavalcade of internet misogynists. Developers Zoë Quinn and Brianna Wu, as well as critic Anita Sarkeesian, were doxed and repeatedly sent rape and death threats (Dewey 2014). For many, it was an introduction to the manosphere.
5. Yiannopoulos later lost his book deal with Simon & Schuster over his own paedophilic banter, perhaps to further complicate his argument (Halper 2017).
6. It is difficult to tell what is motivating some of this research. Hussen et al. (2012), for instance, examine the potential impact of pornography on HIV sexual risk behaviour in black males. Wright and Bae (2015), on whom I rely most, offer measured conclusions and fairly aseptic commentary. At any rate, the notion that an individual medium is a transceiver for behavioural scripts and ideology is not a particularly daring thesis. It would be strange if porn did not act as one while mainstream films and television clearly do.

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